

MP demands investigation into botched arrest of “War Crimes General”
Office of Emily Thornberry MP
13th September 2005

Emily Thornberry, MP for Islington South and Finsbury^{1,2}, today called for a full investigation into the botched arrest by the Metropolitan Police of Israeli Major General Doron Almog. General Almog faces trial in Britain for war crimes in contravention of the Fourth Geneva Convention³, following the issuing of an arrest warrant by Chief London Magistrate Timothy Workman. He is accused of ordering the demolition of 59 Palestinian homes in the Gaza strip, as a means of retaliation⁴. The Anti-Terrorist and War Crimes Unit allowed General Almog to escape to Israel following a tip-off from the Israeli embassy in London.

Emily Thornberry said:

‘The escape of General Almog from British justice is extremely worrying. We seem to have had the farcical situation of police officers waiting at the gate for the General to get off the plane, whilst officials from the Israeli Embassy slip past them onto the plane and advise him to flee! The integrity of British justice has been undermined and we need to know how and why.

‘How was this information leaked to the Israeli Embassy? Why didn’t the police go onto the plane to arrest General Almog when he was on British soil? He seems to have been sitting there for hours. Are the Israeli embassy officials, who seem to have perverted the course of justice, going to be allowed to get away with this?’

Emily Thornberry has written to the Home Secretary and the Metropolitan Police asking for a full investigation. She will also be asking that the Foreign Secretary request that the Israeli Government waive diplomatic immunity for those who helped General Almog evade British justice. She has written to the Israeli Embassy asking that Israeli authorities fully cooperate with the investigation. Emily Thornberry continued:

“It is widely thought that the Israeli security forces operate within a culture of impunity. Less than 5% of civilian deaths caused by Israeli military action are investigated at all⁵. This was an opportunity to hold a very important figure to account. It seems to have been botched. We need to know why.”

“I have seen a transcript of an interview on the Israeli TV programme, Meet the Press, in which the General makes it quite clear that the demolition of houses in Rafah was in retaliation for an attack a few days before on the Israeli army.”

Notes for Editors:

1. Hickman and Rose Solicitors(www.hickmanandrose.co.uk), which is based in Islington South & Finsbury, acting on behalf of the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, asked that Emily Thornberry raise the issue in Parliament and with the Government.
2. Emily Thornberry is a member of the Chambers of Mike Mansfield QC and a former criminal defence lawyer. More information about the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights is available here:
<http://www.pchrgaza.org/files/PressR/English/2005/101-2005.htm>
3. The '*extensive destruction ... of property, not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly*' is a breach of Article 147 of the Geneva Convention. In domestic law, the Geneva Conventions Act 1957 applies to "Any person, whatever his nationality, who, whether in or outside the United Kingdom, commits, or aids, abets or procures the commission by any other person of, a grave breach of any of the scheduled conventions or the first protocol..." [Article 1.-(1)].
4. The warrant, issued on 10th September 2005, is in relation to the destruction of 59 houses in the Rafah refugee camp, situated in the Gaza strip, on 10th January 2002. General Almog headed the Israeli army's Southern Command, an area that includes Rafah refugee camp, between December 2000 and July 2003. On 12 January 2002 he gave an interview to Israeli television programme 'Meet the Press', in which the house demolitions were discussed. An excerpt from the Interview is below:

Interviewer 1: 'Since the attack on the army position at Kerem Shalom [near Rafah] there have been constant retaliatory actions by the IDF. Can you tell us something about the retaliations that are being carried out now?'

General Almog: 'The operations, which have been very intensive, are basically concentrated in the Rafah area, the area from which the Hamas squad set out.....As you pointed out, we demolished houses'.

5. These figures are contained in a report produced by Human Rights Watch (HRW). A press release and the full report can be accessed at:
<http://hrw.org/english/docs/2005/06/22/isrlpa11148.htm>.

6. Amnesty International Press Release:
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGEUR450362005>.